

1974 CBS News Watergate Special Report

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From July 11th 1974 CBS News Special Report on the Watergate investigation

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good evening I'm Roger Mudd Washington has been inundated by another massive set of Watergate transcripts the stack of documents was distributed by the House Judiciary Committee yesterday to the news media for dissemination decide nning these eight volumes contain what the committee has been hearing and reading and leaking from behind its closed door since the 9th of May in a moment five reporters from the Washington bureau of CBS News will tell you some of what is and what is not in these eight volumes to have heard on live television the Judiciary Committee Special Counsel John Doerr reading from these pages day after day probably would have helped President Nixon it is dry musty stuff non-committal reams of old testimony 4,000 pages of raw data without conclusion or comment these volumes do however form the substance from which the committee will shape its decision to impeach or not and these volumes contain some new insights into the state of mind to the president and his men afresh lining for a familiar fabric an occasional lifting of the executive curtain for instance you recall that on August 15th last summer the president went on national TV to explain what he was doing about Watergate and how his legal adviser John Dean at first told him of the cover-up in March it was not until March 21st of this year that I received new information from the White House Counsel that led me to conclude that the reports I had been getting for over nine months were not true on that day I launched an intensive effort of my own to get the facts and to get the facts out whatever the facts might be I wanted the White House to be the first to make them public I am Daniel Schorr that evening March 21st the president dictated into a tape recorder his impressions of a day that he called relatively uneventful except for that oval office meeting tonight the transcription was released the first of any private dictation by President Nixon and it indicates that

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President Nixon and it indicates that his private view of the significance of that meeting contrasted with his public position no mention here of getting the facts out but great concentration on the problems created for the president mr. Nixon's stress of John Dean's warning of the unraveling cover-up was that it will be each man for himself and uh one will not be afraid to rat on the other Jeb Magruder's decision to confess to the grand jury led mr. Nixon to blame HR Haldeman for picking a rather weak man who had all the appearance of character but who really lacks it when the chips are down the president mentioned the idea of grand jury appearances is preferable to testifying before a congressional committee and then added of course the other option is for them not to appear at all but this puts the buck right back on the President as Dean pointed out and leaves a not only the aura of cover-up but also the very great danger that somebody like hunt is going to blow and finally the hope that some cause of action would be worked out at a meeting next day was John Mitchell uh it just seems to me just to hunker down without making any kind of statement is really uh too dangerous as far as the president and then a 57 second silence and then the president said into his tape recorder I got over to the house quite late President Nixon has told the nation that March 21st was a day that he personally assumed responsibility for coordinating intensive new inquiries but he told his tape recorder that night that it was a day of danger for him most of us are familiar with the president's denial of allegations

that during his March 21st meeting with John Dean he approved a promise of clemency or a payment of any hush money I then said that to pay clemency was wrong in fact I think I can quote it directly I said it is wrong that's for sure one of the key impeachment issues has always been what the president meant

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always been what the president meant were said or did about money for a Howard Hunt Mr. Nixon's lawyer James St. Clair has tried to make that the only issue and he has offered two defenses first Mr. Nixon didn't approve any payments and second if he did it was a proper payment of legal fees not hush money paid for Hunt's silence the President HR Haldeman and John Dean did discuss money for Hunt on March 21st St. Clair has called a string of witnesses to prove that word wasn't passed from that meeting to John Mitchell to set the payment in motion but Dean's grand jury testimony released today shows Dean talked to Mitchell about the payment the day before that White House meeting and the Judiciary Committee transcript of the March 21st meeting still shows the president seeming to approve your major guy to keep under control his Hunt I think because he knows about a lot of other things and Mr. Nixon in the dicta belt he made that night says Dean recognized Hunt's demand as pure blackmail the grand jury testimony on the one side and St. Clair's defense on the other have left the money issue unresolved some members think the president is guilty some think he's innocent some just aren't sure Roger President Nixon and his public explanations of Watergate has maintained that he always wanted the White House to be the first to make the facts public in tonight's committee transcripts there is a suggestion to the contrary Lesley Stahl reports evidence in tonight's document shows the president was apprehensive about possible Watergate disclosures less than two weeks after the break-in on the Democratic Party headquarters according to the transcript of a June 30th 1972 conversation with the president and John Mitchell HR Haldeman talked about Mitchell resigning his campaign director he said the longer you wait the more you run the risk of more stuff surfacing on the Watergate caper the president said well I'd cut the loss fast I'd cut it fast then he said if it's a surprise otherwise you're right it will be tied right to Watergate

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right it will be tied right to Watergate and Mr. Nixon said I just wanted to be handled in a way Martha's not hurt the next day Mitchell announced his resignation saying it was because of his wife Martha Roger we'll continue our report on the House Judiciary Committee transcripts after this commercial two of the eight volumes released by the Judiciary Committee tonight form the president's defense that defense was made on June 27 and 28 to the committee by Mr. Nixon's impeachment lawyer James St. Clair but unlike the presentation by John Doar St. Clair Drzen Lucien that the president is innocent Dan Rather reports what St. Clair has depended upon mostly so far before the committee is excerpts from testimony in the televised Senate Watergate hearings and what is in the president's version of the transcripts of White House tapes his basic arguments thus far have been very similar to the 50 page brief printed as a preface to the transcripts when they were made public by the White House St. Clair's principal points are the President had no prior knowledge of the actual Watergate break-in that the President had no prior knowledge of the cover-up until March 21st 1973 trying to establish whether this is or is not true has taken up as much or more of the house committee's time than any other single point St. Clair also insists that the president had no prior knowledge of anyone on his staff committing perjury that the president never authorized any hush money payments to the Watergate burglars and that Mr. Nixon after March 21st 1973 conducted his own active investigation and urged all involved to tell the truth these points remain in dispute and under intense committee investigation St. Clair insists that all already have been proven true St. Clair declined an invitation to be interviewed or make a statement for this broadcast but new secretary Ronald Ziegler speaking on behalf of the president expressed some satisfaction that a substantial portion of the house committee's evidence is finally being

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committee's evidence is finally being released all together but Ziegler complained that portions of it already had been let out in what he called piecemeal fashion and cautioned that by no means all of the evidence has yet been made available Ziegler attacked the House committee leadership for what he called a calculated public relations campaign designed to manipulate public opinion in favor of impeachment well of course I suppose one reason why I can spot a public relations campaign as I know one when I see one I don't think that you can compare the efforts here at the White House to present our case as effectively as possible with the House Judiciary Committee which is proceeding under the Congressional guidelines conducting secret hearings and then first of all leaking in the distorted fashion much of what took place and then after they decide to release all of the material to release it only dribble by dribble because no one then gets the full story until maybe a week from now or two weeks from now and in the meantime the theories that are developed based on the partial material released conditions and in my view manipulates public opinion I think that is the objective of those who made the decision to release it in this fashion I think one thing that the release of this material shows is how damaging the leaks that have preceded the official release of this material have been I'm referring of course to the leaks by certain members of the committee and I think certain members of the staff this material shows how distorted those leaks were I remember the days when we were standing here discussing the fact that the President had said on one occasion that March the 21st was an uneventful day when they leaked that particular section they left out the fact that the president said it was an uneventful day except for the conversation with John Dean I also recall the days that we responded to questions relating to the leak story

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questions relating to the leak story that the President had requested the members of the staff to invoke this fifth amendment well if you read that in context and in light of the facts that followed in the events that followed you'll find that that statement was one where the president was being more of a devil's advocate than issuing an order so I do think that the release of this material will help clear up in the public mind many of the distortions that were created and have been created by the partisans on the committee such as father Dryden and Conyers and Brooks of Texas and other of the partisans who have in my view poorly served the country by adopting such a strident and partisan approach to what I consider to be a very real constitutional responsibility that those men hold Ziegler added that the President did not concern himself today with the committee's release of testimony and evidence that mr. Nixon isn't worried about it nor about its possible impact on the public Ziegler says the president spent most of the day working to improve the me Roger there were these new developments today in the Watergate case the special prosecutor's office declared in court that it had found another gap in a White House tape recording this one lasting 19 minutes a James st. Clair the White House lawyer said it wasn't a gap at all but an interval between the tape running out and the new tape being threaded up John Dean testified at length before the House Judiciary Committee today that session was closed but reportedly mr. Dean was cross-examined sharply by st. Claire committee members said Dean did not provide a clear answer as to whether the president directed that hush money payments be made in March 73 Bruce Morton went to the hill tonight and talked with two committee members Roger this used to be one of the Judiciary Committee's hearing rooms a smaller one than the one that's being used for the impeachment investigation it's turned into sort of a press room it's where chairman Rodino used to come after all

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chairman Rodino used to come after all those closed-door sessions and tell us a little bit of what went on while you were listening to all those thousands of pages of evidence with me tonight are two men who've heard it all Democrat Walter flowers who's on most people's lists as one of the Democrats who might not and Tom Railsback of Illinois who's on most of the people's lists as a Republican who might mr. flowers first you've had some weeks to absorb all this evidence we've been reading it for a day or so but what you don't find is what the committee has come to call the murder weapon the one clear irrefutable piece of proof you agree I agree and I think that what we've done thus far is really set the stage for what we must do over the next couple of weeks and we are entering quite frankly the most important part of our entire consideration

that is the deliberation period when you try to make some farce out of all the trees we've got I think and analyze it each person ponder it and and arrive at some conclusions mr. Rallsback it is it is a case of Gray's as opposed to black and white and it's a circumstantial kind of case I think that's a fair characterization and I agree with I agree with what Walter said that now now is the time really to try to see what we have a summer what we have take those areas where we think there is a potential vulnerability and then try to try to evaluate and then vote I get the feeling of talking to members as they come out during the breaks this past week listening the witnesses that they haven't filled in all the gaps either that it's still a circumstantial kind of thing is that so that's that's entirely true in my judgment but I would not do emphasize the importance of having these live witnesses I know I think Tom and I both have been in the forefront of requesting up to the point

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forefront of requesting up to the point of demanding insofar as we could more witnesses as opposed to the fewer I know it helps me to to get a feeling for the flesh and blood of the situation rather than you might say the sterile transcript of a year long ago of Senate hearing which is probably where most of the evidence has come from it instills life where really we've only had car cold tapes and/or transcripts which are even colder what about today if there's one man who's central to this the dominant accusatory figure in the Watergate hearings it surely is John Dean does he is he credible you've spent two or ten hours almost with him I think he's a very credible witness but like anyone else I don't think mr. Dean is capable of recalling in in exact detail entirely accurately everything to transpired over such a long time ago he's attempted I think our blend well to do that and I took him as a forthright witness and in a sincere witness I maybe what were just disagree to a slight extent in that on other occasions we know that he has misspoke and there was one thing brought today when it finally is revealed as was kind of a serious omission in his Senate Watergate testimony so but I I thought that he was articulate expressive seem to have some self assurance did not crumble under a rather withering cross-examination by st. Claire to have been a presidential assistant or a White House aide during the 72 election year was to have survived a daily blizzard of memoranda some were better at writing them than others one of the best was HR Haldeman 's political assistant Gordon strong who wrote long memos with blanks

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strong who wrote long memos with blanks at the bottom for Haldeman to check yes/no or other dan Rather tells us about the strong file throughout the first four and a half years of the Nixon presidency the most powerful man in the White House other than mr. Nixon himself was HR Bob Haldeman for example even Henry Kissinger often took instructions from Haldeman chief of staff for the president alderman saw more of mr. Nixon than anyone else and was closer to him than anyone outside of Lix and family Haldeman's personal assistant was Gordon strong both men were avid memo writers straughn's past testimony and his memos to Haldeman are considered by the House committee to be especially important and today's release of committee materials is chock-full of them the very first piece of evidence introduced into the committee record is a section of a strong memo to Haldeman dated December 2nd 1971 as early as then the memo indicates Haldeman knew that the president's campaign aides were developing an extensive and extremely well financed political intelligence gathering operation strong wrote that John Mitchell then Attorney General had discussed with John Dean then White House Counsel they need to develop a political intelligence capability the memo goes on to note that G gordon Liddy would quote handle political intelligence as well as legal matters and that Liddy will work with Dean on the political enemies project elsewhere the committee notes in John Dean's grand jury testimony that there had been special White House interest in Democratic National Chairman Lawrence O'Brien as a political enemy since as early as August 1969 it is obvious that through use of Strong's memos and Dean's testimony the committee among other things is investigating the possibility that a desired by highway authorities to get personal information on O'Brien could have been a motivation for the actual Watergate bugging and break-in other strong memos deal with such subjects as Haldeman having personal control from within the White House of a secret fund of at least 350,000 dollars cash from campaign contributions and at Nelson Rockefeller agreeing to give a quarter of a million dollars to the campaign still other

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dollars to the campaign still other memos deal with using government agencies as leverage against people for campaign support including money basing ambassadorships on campaign contributions plus discussions of big money coming in from the milk industry and the possible law violations involved in that running through all of the strong memos is a picture of Haldeman as a man who knew in great detail about people money and operations large and small not only in and around the White House but with the Nixon campaign organization too for example Haldeman personally decided that Commerce Secretary and political fundraiser Maurice stands should be given the status symbol a permission to eat in the special White House mess and Haldeman personally canceled Jeb Magruder is right to see the White House's Daily News summary it is well known that Haldeman consulted regularly and at great length with President Nixon about a wide variety of matters the strong memos make it clear that Haldeman knew a great deal about questionable if not illegal actions they do not make it clear whether the president also knew as a result what the committee now is facing is the possibility that about many of these things only Haldeman and Mr. Nixon know how much the president knew Roger you may recall that after he resigned from the White House staff Haldeman took some of those secret tape recordings home and listened to them his notes on one of those tapes appeared in the evidence today and they seem to fill a gap in what we previously knew Dan Schorr reports the White House transcript of the Nixon Dean Haldeman meeting on September 15th 1972 contains discussion of using the government against the administration's enemies but the transcript ends with a note further conversation following unrelated to Watergate the special prosecutor and the House Judiciary Committee have been trying so far in vain to get those last 18 minutes for which the White House claims executive privilege tonight the House Judiciary Committee released a No that HR Haldeman took when he listened to that tape and they cover the missing portion which concentrates on plans for a post-election shake-up to make the

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a post-election shake-up to make the government more responsive politically we will show you excerpts of Haldeman notes written in his own style of abbreviation and read what they appear to mean the president looks forward to the Justice Department under control refers to the IRS and what it is doing to him Dean we can't get a tax file on McGovern campaign treasurer Henry Kimmelman the problem of Treasury secretary George Shultz there are so many Democrats in the bureaucracy we can get in we've been going round and round with them for two years Haldeman we don't want to take the risk of doing something about it before the election after the election we will and we will ignore complaints speaker omitted here probably the president discussion of cleaning house we need a plan to challenge appointments we have to do it fast I want resignations from all right after the elections Haldeman that project is going full-tilt Dean you learn a lot about people when the crunch is on you get some surprises dean talked about a book he was reading president anyway will fix them two days after the election on November 9th President Nixon announced an executive realignment as his first order of business demanded routine letters of resignation from all higher-level officials and then proceeded to fire hundreds of them now we know some of the background of the housecleaning Bruce Morton has just jumped out of a taxicab back from Capitol Hill let me ask everybody with me the same question has the evidence that we've read about and reported on tonight set the president back or as it helped him or what's it done to his movement first I think in one sense it may have set him back Roger it's a circumstantial case but there's an awful lot of it for one thing for another

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lot of it for one thing for another thing the president has really been able to monopolize the news media lately he's been overseas making peace here spokesmen back here have been able to denounce the Judiciary Committee for secrecy and then for leaks repeatedly and I think effectively now you have this coming out the Senate Watergate committee report coming out and then a series of other books from the Judiciary Committee on ITT and milk and the plumbers and so on and so forth which all adds up to a kind of drumbeat of publicity for impeachment again Dan Schorr well Roger I don't think that you can read the scores the football game at quarter time and half time I think the process like this that the evidence is cumulative and is

accumulating dan Rather I simply don't know I'm tempted to say that it helps the president because it does play into his defensive strategy of wanting to delay confuse and numb people with the whole subject of Watergate in related matters but my guess is on balance know that it will hurt that's based simply on my belief that most people do not like the moral and ethical tone that keeps coming through each and every time we have a fresh piece of evidence of what was said and done in the office the budget in the United States but then damn sure there's still no great explosion in any of this is there I think it's like a critical mass yeah is what you need to change my metaphor a bit before you get the explosion and I think time will tell whether all these things put together at some point are going to add up to a critical mass and then you get the explosion well as Bruce mentioned over the next week or so the committee will be releasing more volumes on ITT in the milk fund plumbers Saturday night the massacre so called the president's taxes and the improvements to his home in San Clemente and in Florida but it was on this evidence that was released tonight

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this evidence that was released tonight that the president's future rests it's evidence that is exclusively Watergate and it seems unlikely that if the case can be made against the president that it will not be resting on the Watergate evidence mr. Nixon has now survived the so-called Saturday night mass after Archibald Cox is dismissal he survived the Mack tax bill of \$400,000 and he survived the explosive deleted of last spring so apparently the toughest time for the president is still ahead and despite the derision that greeted Gerald Ford's remark an impeachable offense is what a majority of the House of Representatives says it is for the Washington bureau of CBS News I'm Roger Mudd good night

END